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An Art Service Bureau

By HOLMES SMITH

THE following brief remarks are intended as a suggestion and not as a complete discussion of the subject.

So far as concerns that portion of the American public that is interested in art, I think we may fairly grant that it is well served by the various art magazines, native and foreign, and by the monthly, weekly, and daily press, which more or less frequently sets before its readers articles on art subjects. It would be impossible for me to estimate what portion of our public is thus provided for, but it is perfectly evident that a vastly greater portion is not interested in art, and, so far as I am aware, there is no direct, organized effort to reach this immense mass of persons through the medium of the general public press.

I think it must be admitted that the welfare of art in the United States depends upon the degree to which these uninterested persons are aroused to a sense of the importance of art in their lives. It will be observed that I do not underrate the very important activities of the other great agencies, such as art museums, the public schools, traveling exhibitions, art associations, and so forth. These are all doing a magnificent work. What I would point out is that most of our best efforts in art-writing are expended in supplying the needs of those persons who are already interested in our subject, and little or no organized effort has been made to make use of that very potent agency, namely, the public press, and especially the daily press, to reach the great mass of our fellow citizens from whom art is closed and sealed.

If we may assume that it is desirable that this deficiency should be remedied, then the question arises: Are there any means by which a remedy can be found? I think I may say that our brothers in education, the

scientists, have pointed the way. They have organized, in Washington, what is called *Science Service*, and from its name you will see the title of my paper, though slightly disguised, is really a stolen one.

I have before me an article reprinted from *Science* for April 8, 1921. This has been supplied to me through the kindness of Dr. E. E. Slosson, editor of *Science Service*, and since he was aware of my purpose in asking him for information, I am sure he will not object to the use I am about to make of it. I propose to take certain sentences and paragraphs from the article, substituting here and there such words as would make them apply to art instead of to science. (These substituted words are italicized.) The article so adapted would be entitled:

“A New Agency for the Popularization of *Art*.”

“In a democracy like ours it is particularly important that the people as a whole should so far as possible understand the aims and achievements of *ancient and modern art*, not only because of the value of such knowledge to themselves but because *advancement in art* directly or indirectly depends upon popular appreciation of its methods. In fact the success of democratic government, as well as the prosperity of the individual, may be said to depend upon the ability of people to distinguish between real *art* and fake, between the genuine *artist* and the pretender.

“The education of children in schools and of a few in colleges is not sufficient for this. It must be carried into maturity through such channels as the newspapers and the motion pictures. Unfortunately the rapid advance and increasing complexity of modern *art* has made it difficult for the general reader to follow its course and he has often given up the attempt in despair. Consequently we find the reading public divided into two classes as may be discerned in any public reading room, a minority that habitually read the *art* journals and a majority that never touch even the most popular of them.

“*There is no suggestion here intended that a new art publication should be started*, for it is believed that much better results can be obtained by devoting the same effort and expense to reaching a wider range of readers through newspapers, and to directing attention

to the various well-edited periodicals of popular *art* already in existence rather than attempting to rival them.

“*Art Service* will aim to act as a sort of liaison officer between *art* circles and the outside world.

“*Art Service* purposes to provide life-continuation courses in all the *arts* for newspaper readers anywhere in American without tuition fees or entrance examinations.

“*Art Service* will spare no pains or expense in the endeavor (1) to get the best possible quality of popular *art* writing and (2) to get it to the largest possible number of readers. If in doing this it can make both ends meet, so much the better. If not, it will do it anyway.

“It will not be under the control of any clique, class, or commercial interest. It will not be the organ of any single *art* association. It will serve all the *arts*. It will supply any of the news syndicates. It will not indulge in propaganda, unless it be propaganda to urge the value of the study of *art*.”

I think I have quoted enough to serve my present purpose. To those who would learn further about the purposes and methods of *Science Service*, I would refer the article itself. I may say, however, the affairs of *Science Service* are directed by a board of trustees composed of fifteen persons selected from various representative bodies interested in Education, Science, and Journalism.

I hope that such part as I have quoted showing the purposes and methods of *Science Service* will serve to provoke a lively discussion in the annual meeting of the College Art Association, and, eventually, some action upon the lines suggested that will greatly extend the usefulness of the association.

I have touched upon the purposes and methods of an Art Service Bureau. There remains the all-important question of the means. Dr. Slosson informs me that *Science Service* is an independent institution, endowed by the generosity of Mr. E. W. Scripps of West Chester, Ohio, for the sole purpose of disseminating scientific information among the people. Is there not in this wide land some one man or woman who would do for art what Mr. Scripps is doing for science?